DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 309 860 PS 018 199

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TITLE The Relationship between Notions of Caregiving Held by Early Childhood Practitioners and Stages of Career Development.
PUB DATE Aug 89
NOTE 19p.; Paper presented at the Annual International Conference on Early Education and Development (21st, Hong Kong, July 31-August 4, 1989).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Child Caregivers; *College Students; Comparative Analysis; *Concept Formation; Early Childhood Education; Higher Education; *Teacher Attitudes; *Teacher Motivation; *Values
IDENTIFIERS *Career Construct; Career Stages

ABSTRACT

Research examined the relation of early childhood practitioners' concepts of the purpose and meaning of caregiving to their stage of career development. Research questions included: (1) What are the notions of caregiving held by practitioners in direct and indirect work? (2) Do these concepts of caregiving expand as the practitioners move from direct to indirect career roles? (3) What are practitioners' reasons for entering the field of child care and early childhood education, and is there any relationship between these reasons and the practitioners' perceptions of caregiving? and (4) Is there a values conflict between traditional notions of caregiving and attributes associated with expanded notions of caregiving? A questionnaire was developed and distributed to teachers in an urban Head Start program, attendees at a large annual conference on early childhood education, and students in an undergraduate and graduate program in child development and child care. A total of 65 questionnaires were returned. Findings indicated that the function of care was seen as including nurturing and "growth encouragement." Predominant motivations to enter the field appeared to be closely allied to views of the function of care. Few respondents favored entrepreneurial values in day care. Implications of the findings are discussed. (RH)

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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NOTIONS OF CAREGIVING HELD BY EARLY CHILDHOOD PRACTITIONERS AND STAGES OF CAREER DEVELOPMENT

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Paper presented at " Childhood in the 21st Century"
International Conference on Early Education and Development

Hong Kong
August, 1989

PS 019139

Abstract

This paper reports results of research study examining how early childhood practitioners' concepts concerning the purpose and meaning of caregiving - as a major function of early childhood education and services - are related to their particular stage of career development as defined by primary function, e.g. "direct" work with children as a teacher or caregiver; or " indirect" work as a supervisor, administrator, trainer, educator, advocate.

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BACKGROUND

To adequately meet childrens' needs in the 21st century will require a cadre of practitioners who both work effectively with children directly and who impact the wider network of social systems that affect the quality of life for these children and their families. That personnel with multi - faceted skills and abilities are needed has been previously documented, e.g. Almy 1988, p. 50) who cites Farnham - Diggory's suggestion that the early childhood educator be a "double specialist". This double specialty involves both teaching young children and working with adults. Similarly, this author, in earlier papers (VanderVen 1980, 1981, 1988) has described the fact that the array of multi - level functions that must be filled in the field of early childhood development and care require personnel with increasingly complex ways of thinking, addressing problems, and of handling both clinical and managerial issues. These can be viewed as expanded ways of providing care, the "raison d'etre" of the early childhood field.

The purpose of early childhood education, according to the National Association for the Education of Young Children Accreditation guidelines, is "the care and education" of children (NAEYC, publication # 20). In line with that, and in view of the more generic and distinctive nature of care, this study focused on perceptions of generic care as the variable to be studied.

However, both basic care abilities, and certainly "expanded" skills in care, do not just spontaneously emerge. They only develop in conjunction with an ongoing process of personal and professional growth based on both experience and maturity. Katz (1977), for example, describes four stages of professional development that early childhood teachers go through, in which their abilities become increasingly expanded. Frede (1985) also presents a four stage model of early childhood teacher professional development.

For the purposes of this study, a three stage model of personal and professional development in early childhood careers based on the various formulations of this author (VanderVen, 1980, 1981, 1988) is used to organize groups of adjectives that relate to notions of caregiving that might be related to the accepting of the expanded responsibilities associated with each stage. (See Table 1).

At Stage 1 are the Novice Caregivers, who on the job are primarily involved in direct care and interaction with children. They are fairly new to the field, often quite young, and may have minimal formal preparation. Thus, their practice may be a direct expression of their own past experience, feelings, and attitudes rather than informed by developmental knowledge and skills developed under supervision. They will tend to have a narrow concept of both role options in the field, and of the attributes of early childhood caregivers, tending to see those related to expanded, indirect roles as "ego alien". Such novices, particularly those who have actively chosen an early childhood career because they actively like children and want to work with them, are particularly subject to practices based on over - identification and rescue fantasies, as expressed by Anna Freud's concept of

Table 1

Stage 1:	**Stage 2**	**Stage 3**
DIRECT CARE - NOVICE	ADVANCED DIRECT CARE (BC +)	INDIRECT CARE
"Altruistic Surrender" (AS)	Cognitive (CO)	Instrumental (I)
Selfless	Rational	Planful
Passive	Cognitive	Goal oriented
Rescuing	Logical	Assertive
Modest	Analytical	Pro-active
		Professional (P)
Affective (A)		Authoritative
Intuitive		Professional
Spontaneous		
Informal	Mayeroff Cluster (M)	Entrepreneurial (E)
Expressive		
	Patient	Manipulative
Basic Caregiving (BC)	Honest	Competitive
Loving	Knowledgable	Entrepreneurial
Nurturing	Devoted	Aggressive
Sensitive	Trustful	Ambitious
Helpful	Humble	Powerful
Sympathetic	Courageous	
Feeling	Hopeful	
Warm		
Empathic		
Kind		
Compassionate		
Flexible		

"altruistic surrender". Similarly, they are highly driven by feelings unmodified by cognitive constructs, i.e. they are highly "affective".

At Stage 2 are Advanced Direct Caregivers. These practitioners have "outgrown" some of the more immature dynamics around caregiving of the novice stage, i.e. "rescue fantasies", are more able to accept - and utilize - the cognitive component of the field, i.e. they are more "informed". Although they continue to employ the attitudes of basic caregiving, their view of direct care takes on a more mature quality. Their direct care reflects greater professionalism; they know what they do, why they choose to do it, what the expected outcomes might be for the children, and can tell all of this to someone else. Work with parents as well as children falls within the purview of many Advanced Direct Caregivers.

Stage 3 practitioners are actually involved in "indirect" work or possibly "blended" careers that include ongoing direct work, perhaps at a highly advanced level, as well. It might be expected that these individuals would espouse values and cognitive stances that would be congruent with being comfortable with work with other adults and "the system" in such roles as supervision, administration, advocacy; and in more specific functions such as marketing, fund raising, promoting the field, achieving legislation. These attributes might be very different from those of Stage 1 practitioners, i.e. comfort with power, entrepreneurship, proactive planning.

Underlying the ability to perform the responsibilities associated with "indirect" roles, particularly, are specific cognitive

orientations and values that "open" the person to seek development of requisite skills and to apply them. These cognitive orientations and values include ways in which practitioners view the basic function of the field - is it narrow or broad - ; and whether or not they see the "indirect" roles as part of it. If these more complex cognitive abilities and values emerge through personal and professional development, then it can be hypothesized that there is a relationship between practitioners' perception of the major purpose of early childhood care and education (i.e. notions of the meaning of caregiving), and their particular stage of career development as defined by primary function, e.g. "direct" work with children; "indirect" work as supervisor, administrator, trainer, educator, advocate.

Thus the purpose of this study was to determine what the perception of caregiving at different stages of practitioner personal and professional development is, what the relationship is between these perceptions and their particular job and role in direct and indirect work, i.e. do the perceptions jibe with the role the person is actually filling.

METHODOLOGY

Formulation of Research Questions

Among the questions set out for this study were the following:

1. What are the notions of caregiving held by practitioners in direct and indirect work ?

2. Do these concepts of caregiving expand as the practitioners move from direct to indirect career roles ?

3. What are practitioners' reasons for entering the field of child care and early childhood education, and is there any relationship between these reasons and their perceptions of caregiving ?

5. Is there a "values conflict" between more traditional notions of caregiving and those attributes associated with expanded notions of caregiving ?

Instrument

A questionnaire, "Survey of Perceptions of the Definition of Caregiving in Child Care Practice" was developed; its coverage included:

1. Open ended request for definition of ..."caregiving as the primary function of child care practice"

2. Demographic information, e.g. age range, sex, number of years in field

3. Brief description of current job or function in child care

4. Options for indicating reason for selecting child care as a field

5. Adjective checklist of attributes associated with various job levels and functions in the field. These were derived from the seminal work of Mayeroff (1971) on defining caregiving; and from earlier work by this author (VanderVen, 1979, 1980, 1981, 1984, 1988) in which attributes related to sequences of increasingly complex functions in child care work work were identified. The adjectives were arranged into categories,

with category headings. These are referred to as " caregiving clusters" and are arranged as appropriate under each career stage as previously described (See Table 1). Basic caregiving belongs in Stage 1 and Stage 2 as well. Because the "Mayeroff cluster" reflects a more noble and mature concept of caregiving, it is placed under Stage 2 as is also the concept of cognition, in line with the premise that professional growth brings greater acceptance of the cognitive aspect of the field.

Subjects

This questionnaire was given to teachers in an urban Head Start program, attendees at a large annual conference on early childhood education, and students in an undergraduate and graduate program in child development and child care. Thus the subjects by definition represented various "ages and stages" in level of preparation and career function. A total of 65 responses were received. Ages of respondents ranged from under 20 (1) to over 60 (1), the modal range was 31-35, with the predominant number falling between the range of 31-45. The largest number of respondents had been in the field either 0-5 years (14) or 11-15 years (15). Seven were men.

Data Analysis

The responses to the questionnaire were recorded on a grid with the subject listed on the vertical axis and the responses to various categories on the horizontal axis. Content analysis of open-ended responses yielded categories for specific coding. This allowed both quantitative summary and qualititative scanning for patterns, for individual subjects and for all subjects together.

RESULTS

1. What are the concepts of caregiving held by practitioners in direct and indirect work ?

20 out of 65 respondents' jobs included a major involvement in "indirect" work; 25 had a primary responsibility for direct care of children; 8 worked with children and parents; the remainder were in " blended" careers which combined a number of functions.

The predominant notion of caregiving held by *all* regardless of job, and sex, was that care involved a *nurturing* function, with a strong element of *growth - encouragement*. The next most predominant notion was caregiving as primarily *growth - encouragement,* with *nurturance* secondary.

Thus, the function of care is seen, overwhelmingly, as comprised of **nurturing** and **growth encouragement**, in either order, no matter what the respondent's actual responsibilities are in actually providing it at a direct or indirect level. Several viewed care as providing "support" - for children and parents. Only a few respondents viewed it in an expansive way, that is, that care could involve activity on behalf of other adults or the "child care system".

The conception of the function of early child care as provided by these respondents is quite congruent with the definition of staff purpose given by the National Associationfor the Education of Young Children Accreditation Guidelines.

2. Do these concepts of caregiving expand as the practitioners move from direct to indirect career roles ?

Since all but three respondents defined caregiving as primarily involving nurturing and growth encouragement, these data suggest that for most in the field, their concept of caregiving does not change *greatly* even if their job function does. There ssems to be some movement in this direction, however.

A total of 12 see the *clientele* of care as being adults - i.e. parents and in several instances staff, in particular - as well as children themselves. Five of these were in indirect job roles and two in blended careers, suggesting some relationship between actual work with expanded client groups and expanded notions of caregiving.

For example, one respondent said that since she was not in direct work, that she would see her role in care as being " a child advocate". Another said that she felt responsible for the staff, students, teachers (as well as the children) in her classroom. Still another respondent (male) indicated that caregiving not only involve facilitating children's overall development, but also that of "parents and other adults for their children." This person, too, is primarily in an indirect role.

3. What are practitioners' reasons for entering the field of child care and early childhood education, and is there any relationship between people's reasons for selecting this kind of work, and their perceptions of caregiving ?

The reponses are ranked in order of frequency:

"I liked children" (52)

"I had pleasant associations and experiences with children" (47).
"I wanted to improve the image of the field" (22)
"I wanted to direct a child care center or agency" (21)
"I wanted to influence policy" (9)
"I thought I could earn a good living at it" (6)
"I thought I could do a better job than parents do" (3)"

In general, predominant motivations to select the field (liking children) seem very closely allied to its basic purpose, no matter what the person's current function is; these don't change in the light of shifting job content.

Although 22 - 1/3 of the respondents - indicated that they would like to "improve the image of the field", their motivations are in general inconsistent with the lack of espousal of the marketing and entrepreneurial values necessary for actually doing this.

The proportion of persons indicating interest in directing a program - an "indirect" career - again nearly 1/3 - is consonant with the general support for cognitive, instrumental and professional values involved in being able to carry out the functions of the job.

Of the 3 who indicated that a wish to "do a better job than parents do" one of them is the only subject under the age of 20. Although, of course, this is only an example of one, this response is consonant with the suggestion that a strong motivation of beginners growing out of their own stage of development, along with rescue fantasies, is to make up to the child for parental failings (VanderVen, 1979).

Interestingly, the subject who gave "advocacy" as the function of caregiving selected "liking children" and having "had pleasant associations and experiences" as her reason for choosing the field as did the one who saw care as fostering development of adults as well as children.

It seems that in general there is a strong and pervasive relationship between practitioners" reasons for selecting early child care and education as a career, and their view as to the function of the field. They entered because they liked children, had had good experiences with them, and see the primary purpose of what they do in the field as providing child nurturing and growth-producing care. This doesn't change no matter what "means" they may be currently involved in to do so.

4. Is there a "values conflict" between more traditional notions of caregiving and those attributes associated with predominant and expanded notions of caregiving ?

In other words, do those practitioners who indeed view attributes of caregiving as comprised of those in the " basic caregiving" and "Mayeroff" clusters, feel that the attributes associated with such clusters as "instrumental", and "entrepreneurial" as antithetical to their value system, rather than being important qualities for at least some in the field to possess ?

Results of the tabulation of the adjective check list responses support this:

Attributes Associated with Stage 1

Altruistic surrender (4 adjectives) - 31 checked
Affective (4 adjectives) - 169 checked
Basic caregiving (11 adjectives) - 646 checked

Attributes Primarily Associated with Stage 2

Cognitive (4 adjectives) - 130 checked
Mayeroff cluster (8 adjectives) -385 checked

Attributes Primarily Associated with Stage 3

Instrumental (4 adjectives) - 156 checked
Professional (3 adjectives) - 93 checked
Entrepreneurial (6 adjectives) - 44 checked

Taking the number of adjectives per category into proportionate consideration (that is, the more adjectives there are per category the more responses there might be) some specific trends in these results are obvious:

* The "Altruistic surrender" of the novice is not predominant in this group - not surprising given the collective number of years in the field - to have stayed this long, they would have "matured out" of valuing these attributes.

* Traditional notions of caregiving as reflected in both the "Basic caregiving" and "Mayeroff cluster" are strongly supported as the raison d'etre of the field and its practitioners

* Although cognitive attributes are not ranked as highly as affective attributes, still there is considerable recognition of the relevance of cognitive skills

* Instrumentality, similarly, receives considerable acceptance as a relevant construct in the field

* Those attributes associated with "entrepreneurship" received glaringly little acceptance - 31 respondents checked none of these adjectives. Only one person checked 5, 1 person checked 3, and many had no checks at all. Of the seven men, who might have been expected to be more accepting of "power", ambition", and similar notions; and four of whom were in "indirect" positions, only 1 checked even two of the six adjectives.

IMPLICATIONS

The results of this study have a number of implications for the further development of personnel and for the field of early childhood practice as a whole.

1. Congruence of choice for entering field and field's purpose.

There is a close congruence between practitioner motivation to enter the field and its formally stated intent and purpose. Furthermore, there are some whose motivations include "indirect" functions, i.e. directing a center. This is important, since center direction is certainly a major necessity. The fact that so few see policy making as an aspiration is not positive, but is in line with the premise that much "sights raising" needs to be done in the early childhood field to involve practitioners in working at the policy level.

Somewhat puzzling is the fact that so many view "image building" as one of their reasons for choosing the field - and indeed this is an important need in it (Pettygrove, Whitebook, Weir, 1984) - yet so directly reject some of the "entrepreneurial" attributes

necessary in order to do so. A promising possibility would be the active recruitment of post - midlife women into these activities, since this is a time when, developmentally, they are coming into their own in terms of their sense of power and effectance (Turbiner, 1982). However, encouragement in terms of education and career development activities would need to start early: 4 female subjects who are over 50 indicated no active acceptance with the entrepreneurial qualities, including "power". Since the men in the study responded similarly, it truly appears as if these attributes are rejected by those who actively choose child care as a career and will not be easily accepted.

Expanded notions of care: Clients and the "System"

There are definitely some expanded notions of care held among this group of practitioners at different career levels. Interestingly, they are more likely to be related to expanded clientele - seeing parents and staff as well as children as clientele - than to the child care system, vis a vis such activities as policy making, fund raising, promotion, marketing, etc.

This seems to be in line with the highly affective nature of the field - where there is professional growth in terms of expanded notions, it is more likely to embrace "people" than the more impersonal "system". The perception of parents as falling within the scope of providing care in the field bodes well for the increasing trend to implement family centered models in many child care programs.

Cognition and Instrumentality:

Acceptance of the proactive stance of instrumentality by

selection of all of the adjectives in that cluster was related to those subjects' being in an indirect career. This suggests indeed that growth into an indirect career - if not totally expansive into an "entrepreneurial" aspect -is accompanied by relevant attributes - which perhaps develop as a result of being placed in the position, as a prerequisite aiding the person in making a role transition; or both.

CONCLUSION

The data of this study offer further possibilities for comparative analysis across the same subject and between subjects. The results as recorded so far(taking into account limitations of the instrument), still can be taken to reflect both positive growth in the field and areas of concern. On one hand, practitioners seem to show a great deal of commitment to children and to delivering service congruent with the primary mission of the field: to provide care and growth encouraging experience. Many feel comfortable with parents, staff, and thoughtful, proactive stances, particularly as they continue their involvement in early child care i.e. progression in career stages.

However, there are some gaps and incongruencies, particularly around the attributes associated with the entrepreneurial cluster, indeed revealing a "values conflict". To further empower itself, early child care will ultimately need people comfortable with these and with the notion of transforming systems, i.e. by influencing policy. It is hoped that both training and education in the field, along with the service system itself, will build in "anticipatory socialization" mechanisms to help prepare personnel to work at these most embracing levels.

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